The Key Is in the Mouth: Food and Orality in *Coraline*

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Articles

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Introduction

In Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, the heroine, on her mission to rescue her parents in the other part of the house, needs to understand the other mother's motivation and asks her one ally, the cat, "Why does she want me? . . . Why does she want me to stay here with her?" The cat responds ambivalently: "She wants something to love, I think. . . . Something that isn't her. She might want something to eat as well. It's hard to tell with creatures like that" (65). The cat offers two interpretive possibilities, that the other mother is motivated either by love or by food, although given his qualifiers he seems unsure which to prioritize.

The cat's inability to distinguish between the other mother's desire to love and her desire to eat reflects the inseparability of these two fundamental human impulses. Most criticism of *Coraline* has so far focused on the first half of the cat's comment, creating Lacanian psychonarratives of Coraline's development, in particular the beginnings of her shift into adolescence and individuation. What strikes us as most interesting in this arc is how the Symbolic is represented and how Coraline negotiates the Symbolic realm. If we take the cat's pairing of love and food as a fundamental clue, then food becomes the Symbolic's central representation within Gaiman's novel. This mention of food within the novel is no single occurrence; instead, food consistently recurs throughout the book at key instances of both the plotline and Coraline's psychonarrative. While we agree with earlier critics that Coraline's identity is bound up in the Lacanian arc, the food offered, chosen, consumed, or rejected inflects the particular content and structure of that arc. As a result, we see that it has a different trajectory and range from the traditional view of the other Lacanian critics. Coraline's

negotiations with the adults over food embody her negotiations in the Symbolic realm, while also revealing how food functions as a cultural signifier. Throughout the novel Coraline uses food to create greater agency for herself, particularly in regard to her relationships with her parents—both real and other. Understanding the social and cultural histories of the foods eaten, presented, or portrayed reveals the strategies Coraline uses to work toward greater autonomy within her family and community, an autonomy that is not necessarily bound up with burgeoning adolescent sexuality.

Part I

Neil Gaiman's work covers an unusually wide variety of genres and audiences, and he has won awards across the spectrum in both the United Kingdom and the United States, particularly for his comics, graphic novels, science fiction, and children's literature. He has an international reputation as a writer. But many critics seem to overlook the fundamental Britishness of his work—and indeed, many elements that make *Coraline* a very English novel get erased in both the graphic novel and film versions of the text in favor of a generic Americanization of the characters and background. For us, exploring the English grounding of Gaiman's original novel is important because it is in those details, particularly regarding food, that we see the formation of the Symbolic.

In 2008, scholarly opinion on *Coraline* crystallized, in the form of four articles on a text with no previously published scholarly commentary other than book reviews. Three of the articles—those by Karen Coats, Richard Gooding, and David Rudd—use an admixture of Freud, Lacan, and Bettelheim, to assert that through the fantasy world of the other mother, Coraline achieves self-definition and autonomy. But Parsons, et al., using the same set of critics, argue that Coraline's individuation is circumscribed by the law of the father.[1] All four articles essentially opt for the cat's first interpretation of the other mother's interest in Coraline: she wants love. All of these critics treat Coraline as an everychild working toward individuation. If, however, we read her as a particular child embedded specifically within English culture, the impact on a Lacanian reading of her individuation is significant. Whereas the other critics see Coraline as moving into the genital stage, we envision a slower psychosocial development; our focus on the role of food within the novel necessitates spending more time thinking about orality within the novel, as a key psychological strategy in and of itself.

A key text within the discipline of food studies that offers an important argument for the oral stage has come from Paul Rozin, who claims that

> Freud chose to frame the clash between our biology and society in terms of the mastering and socialization of our sexual impulses. . . . [H]e would have had a stronger case with eating. Although both food and sex are biologically basic, the need for food is more frequent, more compelling, and frankly, more important in both daily life and in the evolution of animals and humans. (9)

In other words, everyone must eat, but not everyone has to reproduce. The primacy of the oral is not a new idea: Susanne Skubal cites Karl Abraham's 1916 essay, which equates food with love and asserts the primacy of the oral zone (qtd. in Skubal 4). Skubal amplifies Abraham's insight by arguing that "Our first and last eros is oral. . . . [T]he oral has its own pervasive pleasures, desires, and dramas" (4). *Coraline* offers a startling number of dramatic points that center on the food within the novel, suggesting that oral desires dominate the heroine's developing psyche.

When we first read this book, the constant presence of food leaped out at us, in a range of forms from convenience foods, to Coraline's father's "recipes," to the fairy-tale threat of cannibalism. Food marks each pivot point of the plot. It instrumentalizes Coraline's journey. It clarifies her relationships to her parents and to the other mother in terms of her acceptance or denial of foods adults offer, as well as her own developing sense of self in what foods she rejects from adults and those that she chooses for herself. Such choice is enormously important: psychologist Leon Rappoport, in *How We Eat: Appetite, Culture, and the Psychology of Food*, has observed that "when a young child refuses food, or spits out something disliked, he or she is taking a first important step toward self-determination" (209). In other words, Coraline already treats food as representative of a Symbolic Order in which she participates.

Surprisingly little scholarly work has linked food and Lacan, perhaps because Lacan discusses hunger as a form of demand (a satisfiable need) rather than desire (which is eternal and ongoing), and thus hunger has only an incipient place in a Symbolic Order. But food does not simply satisfy hunger: it is a highly elaborated social artifact—food is produced, bought, cooked, prepared, consumed in a mannered form—and thus transcends the demands of hunger and inexorably functions symbolically (Lacan 254).

Carolyn Daniel is one critic who has made a useful connection between food and Lacanian theory, here in her analysis of *The Secret Garden*. She recognizes that food in Burnett's novel, particularly the food related to Colin's transition at the end of the book, functions not solely as a form of nutrition but within a Lacanian Symbolic Order (28–29). Similarly, we see in *Coraline* that the protagonist has to negotiate the Symbolic that is in play between her parents and the other mother, a play that is acted out primarily through food that the adults prepare for or offer to the child. In "The Other Mother: Neil Gaiman's Postfeminist Fairy Tales," Parsons, et al. recognize that food and cooking have a fundamental symbolic value in terms of social roles:

> *Coraline* tells the story of Coraline, a prepubescent girl who has moved to a new house and is bored in the hiatus of school holidays, but it also tells tales about her mother, who does not cook. Instead, Coraline's father makes "recipes" that she detests, and neither of the parents pay Coraline the attention she craves. Coraline consequently enters a fantasy-scape, in which she encounters an all-powerful and sadistic other mother, but one, nonetheless, who plays the traditional mothering role admirably. She cooks the food Coraline loves, provides toys and clothing, and wants to play with her daughter rather than prioritize her career. (373)

For them, the law of the father dominates in both the real and the fantasy world, and in the end Coraline capitulates to her father so that conventional patriarchy triumphs over a dangerously powerful phallic mother. In our reading of the novel, however, which is more akin to Coats's, Gooding's, and Rudd's interpretations of individuation, Coraline learns to negotiate the Symbolic to earn for herself greater agency and power.[2] In other words, Coraline has more power over food, in either the real or the fantasy world, than Parsons, et al. credit her with. We will follow the lead of the cat's observation, with which we started: we will focus on the second half of his comment—that the other mother wants something to eat—and thus the signification of the eating within the novel is a theme we believe to be interpretively rich and untapped.

Part II

As Karen Coats observes in "Between Horror, Humour, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic," at the beginning of the

novel Coraline has begun to separate herself from her parents; she is bored with the status quo and seeks adventure through explorations of her new environment. "When a child develops a capacity to be bored, it is a signal that he or she is in a transitional state, a state where he or she is developing a separate sense of self, a need to assert his or her desires over and against the desires of the mother" (86)—and the father, too, we would argue.

Coraline's desire to claim her autonomy reveals itself in her food choices, initially her refusal to eat her father's "recipe" foods, such as "leek and potato stew with tarragon garnish and Gruyère cheese," and her default preference for convenience foods, such as "microwaved chips [French fries] and mini pizzas" (9–10). As Rappoport noted, such rejection is a typical psychological strategy of many children wishing to differentiate themselves from their parents' desires.

However, it is not simply to distance herself from her parents but to assert her own mastery over the Symbolic that Coraline chooses convenience foods for her own private consumption. Such a choice seems typical for a contemporary child. She prefers safe foods whose expected tastes comfort her. Furthermore, the British food industry has designed them so that she can easily prepare them herself, for herself, using contemporary technology, with no worries about tarragon or leeks invading them before she consumes them. She circumvents her father as mediator, thus rejecting the values that his recipes embody. The recipes are texts; by rejecting them, Coraline rejects his language and the Symbolic Order it represents. As Coats points out in *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*, children are fascinated with the Symbolic, because they recognize that that is where power lies: "Children know even before they learn to talk that the speech act is what gives them power; accession to the world of language is seen as the greatest good. Once in the Symbolic Order, they achieve a sense of mastery over the object" (80). Coraline can't manage the text of her father's recipes, but she can master the text of the chips and mini pizzas. Therefore, she takes up the Symbolic System embodied in the packaging of the convenience foods, thus choosing a greater Other than her father.

With the exception of the mini pizzas and canned spaghetti, both of which reflect the contemporary expanded British palate and desire for convenience, the foods that Gaiman generally chooses for Coraline to consume are rooted in longtime British food culture. Even the "leek and potato stew with a tarragon garnish and melted Gruyère cheese" that

Coraline's father makes uses as its primary ingredients two fundamental foods of the British Isles: potatoes and leeks. But he prepares them in the inventive style of post-1970s French nouvelle cuisine. [3] Coraline, however, prefers her potatoes prepared as microwaved chips, using contemporary technology to produce a food grounded in the British convenience food industry that began in the Victorian era, driven by the growth of the industrial food companies and the need to feed an exploding urban population.[4] As Laura Mason explains in *Food Culture in Great Britain*,

> The most important vegetable in the British diet is the potato. . . . Deep fried chips (French fries) are extremely popular, prepared from scratch at home, bought as frozen chips ready for frying, or baking as oven chips, a more convenient and lower fat alternative. Together with fish, chips have been an important fast food in Britain since the late nineteenth century. (88)

Chips in British culture began as a working-class convenience food but became a mainstay of the British diet for all classes, made most convenient by the rise of frozen foods after the end of rationing in 1954 (Spencer 330).

Coraline's mother also turns to British convenience foods: when the cupboard (now a refrigerator) is bare, she goes out to purchase fish fingers (which Americans call fish sticks), secure in the knowledge that her picky daughter will eat them. Her choice reflects Spencer's point that frozen foods became a fundamental part of the British diet in the 1950s, and that fish fingers became a particular favorite with children (324). This preference was crucial to the success of the industry as a whole. In a book published by the British Frozen Food Federation in 1998, "*When It's Time to Make a Choice": 50 Years of Frozen Food in Britain*, David Davies and Alf Carr cite the claim of Mick Coburn, "elder statesman of frozen food," that the fish finger is the basis of the entire industry, in part because of its appeal to children: "The original frozen convenience food, bone-free, crunchy and attractive to children, [fish fingers] . . . led the whole industry into the national consciousness." Davies and Carr also explain that fish fingers became popular because they "dealt with the problem of the reluctance of many consumers to handle and prepare fish and persuaded many children to eat it" (50).

The convergence of the fish fingers and the chips within Coraline's household resonates with the history of fish and chips as a British national food. In his essay for the 1997 Oxford Symposium on Food

and Cookery, Roy Shipperbottom argues that fish and chips represent the first British convenience meal (264), and both he and Gerald Priestland cite the fish fryers' claim that the combination is "the Great British Invention" (Shipperbottom 264; Priestland 16).[5] Yet the British middle class also stigmatized fish and chips, in part because they were perceived as violating the values of female domesticity. Mothers and wives who bought fish and chips at a shop for dinner rather than preparing food at home for their families failed to live up to the ideals of domestic femininity. John K. Walton observes that the critique dates from Victorian times and has not disappeared; he cites the same criticism from the popular magazine *This England* in 1986. This magazine article censures the working mother's food shortcuts: "She has no time to bake a cake or prepare a nourishing meal of stew and dumplings, so she feeds her family on deep-frozen, micro-waved convenience foods." Walton notes that the magazine goes on to blame the breakdown of morals, the upswing of crime, and the eventual destruction of the nation on the time-strapped working mother who uses prepackaged foods to feed her family (164). Coraline's mother conforms to the food preparation pattern that this conservative perception blames for the downfall of British culture, whereas the other mother offers the traditionally approved model of home-cooked meals, initially suggesting that Gaiman, too, finds inadequate the mother's balancing of the demands of family and work. Yet the family dynamic he portrays has deep roots in British food practices.

Other adults in Coraline's life reinforce English foodways as well. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible offer Coraline very traditional British foods, which she is willing to eat. Garibaldi biscuits have been a staple of English teas since the mid-nineteenth century. Like other fancy biscuits, Garibaldis originated in the manufacture of ship's biscuits for Britain's naval and commercial fleets in its expanding empire. As the increasingly affluent middle class desired accompaniments for light lunches, afternoon teas, and bedtime snacks, both savory and sweet biscuits (sealed in airtight tins for freshness) offered a quick and easy source of premade breads (Spencer 285; Mason 52). Garibaldi biscuit, "a popular British biscuit, named after the famous Italian patriot . . . is a sweet, rather chewy biscuit containing currants, and is known colloquially as 'squashed fly biscuit' from the appearance of the currants" (Davidson 79). The biscuits are thus a traditional snack to accompany the tea that the elderly spinsters offer their young visitor.

Miss Spink and Miss Forcible also proffer limeade, which Coraline takes an immediate shine to: "The limeade was very interesting. It didn't taste anything like limes. It tasted bright green and vaguely chemical. Coraline liked it enormously. She wished they had it at home" (50). Like biscuits, limeade also originated to serve the needs of the British naval and mercantile fleets, which favored juice from limes over other citrus for the prevention of scurvy on long sea voyages (Mason 31). The British government went so far as to require an ounce of daily lime juice consumption per sailor on British ships in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1867 ("Merchant Shipping Act"). Limes come largely from the Caribbean, a convenient source for the British given the number of colonies they had there; lime juice has been imported from Jamaica to Britain since the 1680s (Mason xvii). Rose's Lime Juice became the primary purveyor of the juice; they provided a sweetened version that sailors preferred, which developed into a commercial cordial still available today. The limeade the old ladies give Coraline is a still more industrialized version of the tradition—apparently now divorced from any real limes as ingredients, given its "vaguely chemical" taste. Coraline finds this a desirable trait, given her preference for industrialized foods—so much so, in fact, that she chooses to purchase some to drink when she goes to the grocery store while her parents are missing. She deliberately makes the limeade a part of her personal food repertoire. Coraline's delighted consumption of the modern industrialized version of limeade links her with national identity; the (admittedly derogatory) term "limey" was coined to refer to the British in general based on the synonymous identification of lime juice with British seafarers.

So an investigation of Coraline's patterns of eating reveals that most of the foods she chooses for herself are fundamentally British. Food scholarship inevitably looks at how recipes and cookbooks are rooted in family, community, culture, or nationality. Such scholarship always wants to see recipes as more than themselves; they occupy a place in a signifying network.[6] But Gaiman gives no sense of where the father's recipes come from. In "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster á la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie," Susan J. Leonardi claims that

> Even the root of *recipe*—the Latin *recipere*—implies an exchange, a giver and receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be . . . A recipe is, then, an embedded discourse, and like other embedded discourses it can have a variety of relationships with its frame, or its bed. (340)

The foods the father makes that so offend Coraline violate Leonardi's claim for the function of recipes, because they are creative experiments rather than outgrowths of familial or cultural tradition. There is no context, no embedded discourse with which Coraline is familiar. Given that both parents sit in front of the computer all day long, the recipes very likely come from the Internet. In her 1998 essay "Plat du Jour," Luce Giard reviews the important history of the passing down of recipes from generation to generation, noting that although a compendium of recipes was one of her mother's most prized wedding gifts, such a gift seemed irrelevant and anachronistic for her own late twentieth-century wedding, because she gets her culinary information from women's magazines, radio, or TV shows (178). Gaiman updates such cultural practices with computers. Coraline's father, therefore, offers his daughter food that lacks any kind of familial or cultural tradition. It lacks Leonardi's "reason to be," and thus Coraline vehemently rejects it. In the context of a new house in a new neighborhood, her father's food gives her none of the comfort of her chosen convenience foods.

To understand this behavioral pattern, we must understand how this family is constructed. In *The Taste for Civilization: Food, Politics, and Civil Society,* Janet Flammang describes the difference between preindustrial and industrial families; the former are invested in the home as a place of value and productivity, whereas the latter are alienated from the home space, because value and productivity have been externalized, leaving the home as simply a place to sleep (27). Coraline's family is a strange postindustrial hybrid of the two. Though her parents work in the house, connected through their computers to external networks of production, they remain alienated in the space in which they live. Although the father does create dishes in the kitchen, it is a lonely place where he is not joined by his wife, and his daughter emphatically rejects his efforts; furthermore, Gaiman shows only the results of the father's cooking, never the process. Coraline's mother prepares only generic processed foods: "Her mother sometimes made chicken, but it was always out of packets or frozen, and was very dry, and it never tasted of anything" (29). The mother's choice to use consumer shortcuts rather than sacrificing her time to domestic pursuits suggests her distance from her mothering role, resulting in Parsons, et al. labeling her a "material" feminist (372). Coraline thus must choose daily among tasteless processed food, rootless recipe food, and culturally rooted convenience food, and it is quite clear which of these food choices she prefers. Given the upside-down nature and rootlessness of food and

its preparation within this family, combined with the parents' focus outside the home, it is no surprise that Coraline also looks beyond the home for a clearer sense of meaning and belonging.

The postindustrial family does not conform to the simple binaries of the conventional law of the father and thus exhibits a variety of stressors; while Coraline's parents are juggling the conflicting, nuanced demands of postindustrial career and family, she searches for a simpler meaning to her life. Parsons, et al. rightly note that *Coraline* is Gaiman's critique of the postfeminist world because he writes from the position of the law of the father, attempting to evaluate that world through a reassertion of those simple binaries. We would build upon that insight and claim that the law of the father itself has evolved out of the binaries into something much more complex and contested. As we noted earlier, women were criticized throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for turning to convenience food and thus "abandoning" their domestic roles. Yet in "*When It's Time to Make a Choice*" Davies and Carr speak to the frozen food industry's campaign to educate women to prepare and serve fish fingers, not only to create customers but to free up women to enter the workforce. In *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*, Laura Shapiro makes a similar argument about the convenience food industry in the United States after World War II, when women were caught between competing discourses of domesticity and economic productivity.

Coraline as a whole must be understood within this conflicted history of food and evolving cultural and economic norms and expectations, but that history is also the fulcrum point that opens up the transition between Coraline's and the other mother's worlds. The crisis is precipitated by a lack of food for lunch: "Coraline's mother looked in the fridge and found a sad little tomato and a piece of cheese with green stuff growing on it. There was only a crust in the bread bin" (24–25). There are no basic foodstuffs out of which the mother can produce a simple and tasty lunch. To fulfill her maternal role as food provider, she must do the shopping she has hitherto failed to accomplish. The apparently simple solution is a trip to the store; she decides on fish fingers, partly to appeal to her daughter's tastes, but mostly because when she brings them home she will be able to heat them and get lunch on the table quickly. Her decision thus bridges conventional domesticity with the expectations encouraged by the convenience food industry. Thus her only recourse for solving the food crisis is to leave the house in search of processed food, a seemingly simple solution that in fact

depends on a hidden but hugely complex set of cultural mechanisms to make those items available on a supermarket shelf. The lack of food at home and her hasty solution to the problem of providing lunch for her daughter—signs of her failure as a mother according to conventional domestic ideals—open Coraline to the other mother.

The consequence of the mother's absence is to leave Coraline bored, hungry, and alienated within her own home. Momentarily abandoned by her mother, it is at this point that Coraline finds the connection between her home and the world of the other mother, whose first action is to fulfill the absent mother's duty by making her daughter lunch—and not just heated-up processed food, but a feast made from scratch: "a huge golden-brown roasted chicken, fried potatoes, tiny green peas. Coraline shoveled the food into her mouth. It tasted wonderful" (28). Roast chicken is a cultural comfort food, and for Coraline it signifies an idealized family order that she has been missing. Coraline's response reflects a short essay by Judith Gorfain in *Gastronomica* called "Act of Love," extolling the aesthetic and gustatory perfection of a roasted chicken, from preparation through plating:

> She is beautiful indeed, redolent with rosemary, garlic, an elusive note of citrus, her skin delicately crisp and brown, burnished gold. Loosely tented with foil she rests, composing herself, as her juices and flavors redistribute themselves. (23)

Gorfain narratively remakes the chicken into an idealized object, a parallel of the process by which the other mother uses her roasted chicken to produce a similar sublime sensory experience. The other mother's beautifully cooked and flavorful chicken enables Coraline to see it as a material object that mirrors cultural expectations. The other mother hopes that this epiphany will lead her to see this other home as the ideal space in which she belongs. Coraline recognizes the convention that the other mother employs from the dominant cultural narratives of domesticity, and she initially responds to it hungrily.

The sublime aesthetic chicken is the best shot the other mother makes at taking over the mother's role, creating a competition for the Symbolic order that Coraline immediately responds to with great pleasure. Gaiman deliberately contrasts the other mother's ideal chicken with the real mother's dry, tasteless processed chicken and with the gourmet chicken Coraline's father prepares, neither of which appeals to Coraline's ideal food aesthetics. Her father does cook from scratch, but his concoctions do not fit the cultural narratives Coraline wants:

"he bought real chicken, but he did strange things to it, like stewing it in wine, or stuffing it with prunes, or baking it in pastry, and Coraline always refused to touch it on principle" (29). The other mother's simple roasted chicken, fried potatoes, and fresh green peas, however, fit perfectly with Coraline's food principles.[7]

Coraline's second passage into the other mother's world, in search of her missing parents, is equally marked with food, particularly in the conflict between the hot chocolate proffered by the other parents and the apples Coraline brings with her. It becomes clear in the second visit that the other mother's use of food represents a conscious and malevolent strategic purpose. Although Coraline was impressed with the other mother's kitchen abilities on her first journey, she recognizes before returning that the other mother's food is not to be trusted and must be combated. Coraline needs to come back into the other mother's space prepared to counter the perfection of the beautifully prepared meals she knows she will be offered. She understands the game that the other mother is playing, that the other mother has a very powerful ability to tempt her. If she's going to resist that temptation—perfect food as signifier of an all-encompassing domestic bliss—she needs to bring in something else that can trump the other mother's power: thus the apple.

Through her minion, the other father, the other mother again woos Coraline when she returns, offering a "midnight snack" and hot chocolate (61). Instead of succumbing to the rich sweet treat, in a deliberate show of defiance Coraline consumes one of the apples with which she armed herself before leaving her real home. The apple stands out as singularly different from all the other food in the book because it is simple and unprocessed. The apple functions on many levels, most obviously in its biblical associations and the developmental arc of Coraline's emotions, but it can also be read for its place within British food history. No one can encounter apples within a Western text without deploying a conventional interpretation about innocence, knowledge, experience, and temptation. Unlike the biblical Eve, though, within this story Coraline has no male figure to tempt; the focus is on her own temptation and potential fall rather than her role as a conduit to another's fall.[8] She brings apples with her when she returns to the other mother's world as a means of resisting the temptations that the other mother's delicious cooked meals represent, e.g., her own desires for a more perfect family. Instead she consciously opts for the uncooked integrity of the raw fruit that she herself has purchased. In this context

the apple symbolizes knowledge that allows her to combat temptation rather than succumb to it.

Further, she explicitly chooses apples for herself: she purchases a bag of them at the supermarket after her parents disappear, then writes a story on her father's computer about a girl she names Apple (51). (Though Gaiman does not say so, it is irresistible to imagine that her father uses a Macintosh!) The story ends badly, with Apple dancing so much that her feet turn into "sossajes" (sausages). At this point, apparently abandoned by her parents and trying to take care of herself, Coraline can only imagine tragedy. But as she embarks on her own adventure, the apple becomes a means by which she can work toward a successful resolution, because the apple avatar of the story becomes the food she selects as her defensive weapon against the other mother's culinary lures. It is a transformative moment of empowerment: the apple develops into a means of enabling selfhood, agency, and growth toward maturity, of resisting the other mother's desire to infantilize her and truncate her emerging autonomy.

Apples also resonate significantly within British food history. According to Laura Mason, "[a]pples are the quintessential British fruit" (93).[9] They are the oldest cultivated fruit in human history, and the historical record of their systematic cultivation in the British Isles dates back to at least the thirteenth century (Davidson 26–27). In essence, the apple is the simplest vessel of British food that we see in the novel. Inherent within it is not only a long history of cultivation in Britain, but its place as a signifier of British taste. Just as Coraline chose national (albeit processed) British convenience foods, in choosing apples as her weapon against the other mother she aligns herself with a key piece of British food history, thus using cultural identity as a way of combating the other mother's attack on her own developing sense of self.

The other mother has her own historically and culturally potent food in the hot chocolate. This is not merely a comfort food, but a substance of "basic importance in British culture," found in almost all British households, a "milky drink" used as a "nightcap" (Mason 103). It derives from British colonial history, a drink that came out of the expansion of the British Empire: "staples of the British kitchen, such as . . . tea, coffee, and cocoa were also produced by the countries of the empire and imported in large quantities" (Mason 109).[10] So the cocoa has cultural currency as well as decadent allure, but Coraline trumps the processed sugar with her naturally sweet apples, a home-grown food with a far deeper history in the British cultural imagination.

What we find most interesting is that the struggle is not merely a food fight between apples and hot chocolate, but that Coraline uses the apple to discover the reliability of her judgment. When the other mother shows Coraline the false image of her parents returning home from vacation and celebrating their freedom from the burden of a daughter, Gaiman picks up the apple imagery to describe Coraline's self-doubt:

> She hoped that what she had just seen was not real, but she was not as certain as she sounded. There was a tiny doubt inside her, like a maggot in an apple core. Then she looked up and saw the expression on her other mother's face: a flash of real anger, which crossed her face like summer lightning, and Coraline was sure in her heart that what she had seen in the mirror was no more than an illusion. Coraline sat down on the sofa and ate her apple. (63)

This image depicts a compact developmental arc that shows Coraline moving from uncertainty to understanding, because at the end of this scene she is sure that the other mother presents illusion, not truth. Gaiman quickly introduces and equally quickly dispenses with the maggot of self-doubt to end with Coraline confidently munching on the apple, secure in her sense of the rightness of her own judgment because she was observant and saw the other mother's anger. This moment of self-assurance, when she comes to the key strategic understanding that the other mother produces illusions, makes possible Coraline's challenge to the other mother the next morning, because she now believes she has a real chance to take on the other mother and win. It is the apple, with its deep roots in British history, that marks her realization, because it represents her judgment, which is shown to be reliable, not maggoty. A good, sound British apple equals good, sound British judgment.

Coraline needs and uses her newfound self-confidence to resist the other mother's attempts to infantilize her the next day. When Coraline flatly refuses to behave like a conventional daughter, defying the other mother's desire to play games and tuck her into bed with a goodnight kiss, the other mother punishes her by locking her up. Though hungry, Coraline remains self-possessed, using another apple to make do while she considers her options: "Her stomach rumbled. She ate her last apple, taking the tiniest bites, making it last as long as she could. When she had finished she was still hungry" (87). She thus survives her first test, but at this point, she no longer has food reserves and her

body does demand sustenance. Yet when released the next morning, she continues her resistance despite the other mother's tactics. The other mother hopes that hunger will result in capitulation and offers perfect food once again as enticement, but while Coraline does eat she nonetheless refuses to submit. She not only will not capitulate, it is during breakfast that she issues her challenge to the other mother, setting the terms for the showdown between them.

The other mother clearly hopes that the strategy that worked on Coraline's first visit will work again, and having used the stick now offers a carrot in the form of a simple traditional English breakfast, a light version of the Victorian-era breakfast composed of bacon and eggs (Spencer 259). She prepares a perfect cheese omelet, which she claims is Coraline's favorite food. Gaiman allows us to see the other mother's complete mastery of food preparation by giving us a full description of the process as she cooks the omelet, and Coraline's physiological response (her "mouth watered") as she is tempted by the sight and smell of the exquisitely prepared breakfast:

> She was bustling between the pans and the fridge, bringing out eggs and cheeses, butter and a slab of sliced pink bacon. . . . With one hand she cracked the eggs into a bowl; with the other she whisked them and whirled them. Then she dropped a pat of butter into a frying pan, where it hissed and fizzled and spun as she sliced thin slices of cheese. She poured the melted butter and cheese into the egg-mixture, and whisked it some more. … "Smell the lovely breakfast I'm making for you." She poured the yellow mixture into the pan. "Cheese omelette. Your favorite." . . . The other mother took the bacon from under the grill and put it on a plate. Then she slipped the cheese omelette from the pan onto the plate, flipping it as she did so, letting it fold itself into a perfect omelette shape. (90–92)

What is striking about this description is the amount of space and detail Gaiman lavishes on it over three pages, fitting it in among the discussion between the other mother and Coraline. Her culinary skills are on full display, and at least in terms of her skills with food the other mother appears infinitely superior to Coraline's real parents. Within the confines of conventional familial ideology, the foods she produces are exactly what convention demands.[11]

But there is one errant note in the performance: the typical English breakfast comes with a more simply prepared egg, whereas the omelet

is an imported French tradition (Davidson 555–56). Mason observes that "Eggs in some form, usually fried, are regarded as an essential component of a full breakfast. Other cooking methods include boiling, poaching in hot water or over steam . . . or scrambling. More complex egg dishes are few. Omelettes are made as light lunch or supper dishes" (81–82). The other mother thus demonstrates her sophistication in her fancy French-inspired preparation, though curiously she does not produce the full English breakfast of "fried bacon, eggs, sausages, and tomatoes, plus toast, butter, marmalade, and tea or coffee" (Davidson 104). She does appeal to Coraline's consistent desire for the simple, tasty cuisine that she so rarely gets from her real parents, and Coraline, now very hungry, does eat most of it. Yet eating is not giving in; Coraline eats for fuel, rather than aesthetic and gustatory pleasure, and deliberately chooses not to consume the most decadent part of the offered breakfast: "She drank the orange juice, but even though she knew she would like it she could not bring herself to taste the hot chocolate" (Gaiman 93). The other mother's food strategy fails because at this point Coraline is highly conscious of it and possesses the self-control to step back from temptation. She conquers her own desire through her refusal to consume. Significantly, it is also at this moment that she offers the challenge of the exploration game, staking her own life as well as the future of her parents and the three ghost children on her belief in her own abilities. Through her resistance to the offered sensual temptations, Coraline now negotiates as an equal to the other mother, rather than the infantilized child the other mother would have her be.

Part III

It is tempting—almost—to leave the conflict between Coraline and the other mother as a food duel, grounded in the history of English foodways. While an interesting surface reading by itself, this does not, however, take into account the intense orality of the novel. Food is the content of the conflict: what is offered, accepted, or refused; what passes the lips and is chewed and swallowed; what fills the mouth (and the stomach). But the food is not the reason for the conflict. It does not form the conflict; rather, what shapes the significance of the food in *Coraline* is the novel's orality, the mouth that eats and would eat, the mouth driven to consume. The other critics discussed above also rightly read for psychological truth, but they follow the conventional Freudian reading that resolves all psychological narratives in the manifest

sexuality of the genital stage, and thus skim past the complexities of the oral stage and its mouth. Having analyzed the content of the food duel between Coraline and the other mother, we shall now turn to the fundamental psychological relationship—infantilization—which defines how the other mother sees Coraline and which Coraline resists. The food is simply a means of manifesting that relationship, that struggle. The question is, of course, what does all this food mean? All this Britishness is an unconscious manifestation of the struggle for autonomy and identity; it embodies the oral struggle at the core of the novel. The food feud is a repressed struggle for dominance, acted out through the means of food as persuasion, as argument and counterargument, while hiding the real conflict: the real feeding, the real desire to consume, the real consumption of the Other.

As the real contest between Coraline and the other mother comes to a head, the other mother switches her role from food preparer to consumer, and concomitantly Coraline shifts from being wooed with food to potential meal. The other mother's change in approach is signaled by her consumption of live beetles, out of a bag as though a snack. She offers some to Coraline, who thinks she is being offered toffees until she looks in the sack. Like most Westerners, Coraline finds eating insects a "revolting practice" (Davidson 403), particularly aggravated by the bugs being still alive and attempting to escape their fate. She refuses to join the other mother as consumer of a food that her English real world defines as taboo, calling the other mother "sick and evil and weird" for snacking on bugs (78). The other mother responds with a lesson on manners that is itself a violation of conventional manners: "'Is that any way to talk to your mother?' her other mother asked, with her mouth full of blackbeetles" (78). This moment is much more telling of the values that inform the other mother than either her perfectly prepared roast chicken or omelet. This is the moment when the orality of the novel is most evident, because we identify Coraline both with the live bugs trapped in the bag seeking escape and with the bugs in the other mother's voracious mouth. If she eats bugs, she might eat children. The cat certainly suggests that she might, and indeed Coraline discovers that she already has when the children in the closet tell her that "She kept us and fed on us, until now we've nothing left of ourselves, only snakeskins and spider husks" (85). Thus, the other mother joins a long list of antagonists in children's literature who threaten to consume children: the stepmother queen in "Snow White"; the witch in "Hansel and Gretel"; the giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk"; the wolf in "Little

Red Riding Hood"; Mr. McGregor in *Peter Rabbit*; the Wild Things in *Where the Wild Things Are*.

To theorize the orality in the novel, we turn again to Susanne Skubal, who dedicates a chapter in *Word of Mouth* to puzzling out cannibalistic human tendencies. Skubal locates children's primary fears in oral threats:

> But the images of horror that visit the minds of children may be more telling in their single-minded explicitness: the monster has teeth. Hansel and Gretl's [sic] witch wants to fatten them for her oven, the Troll under the bridge will eat the Billy Goats Gruff, and the wolf—everybody's wolf—is licking his lips and baring his teeth. Whatever it is that is in the closet or under the bed or in the bushes of bad dreams menaces most with its mouth. (103)

These creatures of nightmare are sourced in the orality of childhood desire, so that what children fear most reflects their own desire to consume, and thus the mother is the first object-cathexis. To explain the orality of childhood experience, Skubal turns to Melanie Klein, who "make[s] the case for the maternal breast being the original good object of object relations . . . [and] contends that the development of impulses, phantasies, and anxieties originate [sic] in the *hostile* feelings toward the mother's bad and dreaded breast" (108–09; original emphasis). This leads to Klein's concept of the oral sadistic:

> [Klein] asserts that sadism reaches its zenith in the earliest stages of life, specifically in "the oral sadist desire to devour the mother's breast (or the mother herself)" (177). The subject's dominant aim is to possess the contents of the mother's body and to destroy her by means of every weapon which sadism can command. The child expects to find within the mother everything it desires, . . . all of which is thought to be *edible*. . . . The enormity of the phantasized oral attack on mother is matched by a profound and overwhelming fear of retaliation. . . . (Skubal 109–10; original emphasis)

Desiring to consume the mother, the child feels guilty and thus projects her own desire onto the mother, who becomes the prototype of all the would-be child eaters of fantasy.

Skubal's formulation of Klein beautifully explains what is going on in Coraline's emotional life. Detached from her previous routine by her family's move to a new house and new town, facing attending a new school, and so desiring reassurance and stability, Coraline regresses

back into the oral stage in her need for parental attention. Figuratively, she tries to consume them by distracting them from their work, yet her busy parents are unresponsive; they expertly frustrate Coraline's desires, effectively neutralizing her by developing strategies to avoid her demands on their time. Coraline's good postmodern parents are patient and placating, and so do not threaten Coraline with punishment for her attempts to consume them, however much she pushes them. Yet she instinctively knows that her challenge to them should result in the "retaliation" that Klein theorizes. In such an emotionally repressed environment, unable to admit she wants to consume her parents or to project her own desires onto them, Coraline creates the fantasy of the other mother who manifests the ancient family drama by offering her both all the attention she craves and the retaliation she expects. Thus Coraline deals with her own consumptive desire through projecting it on the other mother, then facing the threat and successfully resolving it in her fantasy.

Coraline is full of examples of the oral sadistic, but particularly in the imagery that defines the other mother, who most frequently is characterized by her threatening mouth. When Coraline returns to the other side of the house to rescue her parents, "the other mother smiled, showing a full set of teeth, and each of the teeth was a tiny bit too long" (61); later they are "sharp as knives" (128). The other mother fills her mouth with blackbeetles (78); she stores the housekey in her mouth, which she coughs up to give to Coraline (107); and the three ghost children claim that she "fed on" them (85). The other father dissolves into a bread dough-ish monster that lunges at Coraline "with its toothless mouth opened wide" (112). The other mother appears so voracious that she seems to have eaten even the fruit in the still life painting in the drawing room: "all that remained in the bowl was the browning core of an apple, several plum and peach stones, and the stem of what had formerly been a bunch of grapes" (128). Most overtly, when Coraline escapes from the other mother's part of the house with the rescued children and parents, Gaiman explicitly describes the corridor as a mouth in the passage we quoted earlier: "what she touched felt hot and wet, as if she had put her hand in somebody's mouth" (135). We will borrow Karen Coats's phrase, but without irony: Yes, "mouth indeed." In this interpretation, the other mother represents a threatening oral trauma, but rather than reading the imagery as the *vagina dentata* and/or leading to the sexualization of the protagonist's identity, we argue that the other mother's world represents a moment of regression to earlier fears.

Coraline's experience with the other mother conforms to Klein's claim that cruel narratives proliferate in the child's life during the oral sadistic phase. Klein argues that "The abundance, force and multiplicity of the cruel phantasies which accompany these cravings [to destroy the mother] . . . find their culmination in cannibalism. . . . [The child's] sadistic phantasies gain fullness and vigor" (130). Coraline becomes most focused on the destruction of the other mother once she takes up the other mother's challenge; she initially just wants to get her parents back but comes more darkly to desire the destruction of the other mother as well. Klein's theory also helps make sense of the unusual two-part structure of the novel's conclusion. On the one hand, we expect that the rescue of the parents, the celebratory meal with them, and the picnic with the rescued children should provide the novel's conclusion, according to heroic fantasy genre conventions. On realizing the other mother's hand is still scuttling around and must be dealt with, the reader, like Coraline herself, may well feel "it's just not *fair*. It should be over" (145; original emphasis).

Significantly, though, that second section of the book's conclusion is structured around three major staged food events: the pizza dinner, the dream feast, and the dolls' picnic. In the first, Coraline transitions from the other mother's mouth to her father's dinner. Having fallen asleep exhausted after rescuing her parents, she is awakened by her mother and told dinner is ready. The dinner signifies the conventional coming together of the family around a single meal, a kind of celebration. The pizza is one of her father's many experiments: it has unusual toppings (green peppers, little meatballs, and pineapple chunks) and is rather poorly made, with the crust overcooked in some spots and underdone in others, but she eats it willingly—except for the pineapple. She has compromised her earlier principles enough that she can partake of her family's communal meal but she still retains the principle of individual choice, important for her identity development as Rappoport pointed out. Her father's "recipe" food now symbolizes familial unity. His cooking is less deracinated and alienating than it was before she went to the other mother's domain. Coraline is beginning to build a more extensive signifying network through food, one that is grounded in her family, particularly her father, rather than in the conventional nationalist convenience foods that formed her earlier preference. The convenience foods are unlikely to disappear, given her mother's lack of skill in the kitchen, but now at least the father's efforts have meaning for her and therefore she is willing to expand her food repertoire to

incorporate them. In keeping with Luce Giard's analysis, then, what Coraline adapts to is the postmodern family, which Parsons, et al. also claim, but they entail that claim with the Lacanian law of the father, using the proof of the father's recipes as a sign of patriarchal order. But these recipes have no authority through any patriarchal line—or even a matriarchal one, for that matter. They are simply signs of a decentered knowledge network in which this postmodern family participates.

The pizza dinner that brings the family back together initially seems like it will function like the feast at the end of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* or the picnic at the end of *Winnie-the-Pooh* or the climactic feast at Toad Hall in *Wind in the Willows*, but Gaiman undermines the completeness of the resolution because, as Coraline notes, her parents seem utterly clueless about what has happened. She is, in fact, in the exact position predicted by the false Mr. Bobo while she was back in the other mother's part of the house: "Nothing has changed, little girl. . . . You'll go home. You'll be bored. You'll be ignored. No one will listen to you, not really listen to you" (118). And indeed, her parents are neither aware of their earlier peril, nor cognizant of Coraline's own heroic role in saving them. But the narrative arc needs to marginalize them at this point because Coraline's struggle is not centered so much on her mundane relationship with her parents as it is on Coraline's own psychonarrative, and thus the ultimate conflict that the novel must resolve is her clash with the other mother (metonymically represented by the severed hand), who symbolizes Coraline's own oral sadism.

The pizza dinner, a real meal, wraps up the parents' part of the plot. The next two meals are child-centered and imaginary, and it is only in the imaginative space that Coraline can finally create the ending that she needs. Significantly, both are picnics: 1) the very conventional celebratory feast that brings the ghost children's story to a close; and 2) the pretend dolls' tea party that Coraline constructs to trap the other mother's hand in the abandoned well. Unlike the pizza dinner, in which Coraline's heroism is not recognized, the dream picnic honors her accomplishments as the ghost children thank her for their rescue. It is during this first picnic that Coraline realizes that her work in defeating the other mother is not yet done, and moreover it serves as a template for the ambush that she constructs.

Why picnics? Gaiman draws on longtime British children's culture and literature in using picnics as the settings for first his protagonist's epiphany and then the climactic confrontation. Spencer notes that in Victorian Britain, picnics became "an enthusiastic passion" (256), and

Davidson observes that "Picnicking . . . enter[ed] into the literature of that period" because a picnic as "a rustic idyll furnished an ideal way of presenting characters in a relaxed environment, and also provided an opportunity to describe a particularly pleasant rural spot" (603). Memorable outdoor meals occur in many classic British children's books: Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. And, of course, the genesis of *Alice in Wonderland* was Lewis Carroll telling the Liddell girls a story during a picnic.

Gaiman sets up the fantasy feast in exactly such an idyllic natural setting, "under an old oak tree, in a green meadow" with a "deep, untroubled blue" sky overhead (141); the provisions include a delectable set of favorite picnic foods: "There was a white linen cloth laid on the grass, with bowls piled high with food—[Coraline] could see salads and sandwiches, nuts and fruits, jugs of lemonade and water and thick chocolate milk" (141). All these foods are picnic staples easily recognizable to the modern child; additionally, each of the ghost children, who embodies an era of the British past, consumes his or her own favorite foods from that period: the boy in velvet knee britches (from the seventeenth or eighteenth century?) piles "his plate high with boiled new potatoes and . . . whole, cooked, trout," while the nineteenth-century girl eats slices of bread and purple jam. The fairy girl, a representative of ancient British folk beliefs, sups on flowers. Their dining choices reinforce Gaiman's pattern throughout the novel of consistently turning to British foodways, historic and even mythological, as an integral part of characterization and plot.

During the lovely dream picnic, the ghost children help Coraline understand that while she has enacted the traditional hero's role in saving them and her parents, she still has not vanquished the threat that the other mother presents. Within the oral stage, the other mother represents an ongoing threat to destroy Coraline, a threat that was supposed to be repressed by shutting the door and locking it. But the fact that the hand is still scuttling free in the world means Coraline's work is not finished: more repressing needs to be done. Correlatively, Coraline's solution to the threat that the other mother's hand poses enables her to confront and defeat her own oral sadism. Thus the dream picnic inspires Coraline to take the final step in her own narrative arc: facing down the necessity of consuming the other mother.[12]

Mimicking the other mother's desire to infantilize her, Coraline takes the dolls she has outgrown—to use as "protective coloration," she tells her mother (153)—and creates a scenic picnic at the well.

To fool the other mother's hand, she self-consciously adopts the long-time conventions of British childhood culture and literature. Gaiman plays with this tradition by having his protagonist turn the "rustic idyll" of a picnic into a Freudian trap. Like her Victorian predecessors, in her pretend picnic Coraline enacts a civilized meal, with all the table accoutrements (both real and imagined), outside in nature. She uses the ruse of a formal tablecloth and toy teacups, even serving imaginary cherry cake on imaginary plates to her dolls to maintain the illusion of careless childhood play. This pretense allows her to use these emblems of civilized and domesticated manners to hide her snare, the flimsy tablecloth baited with the housekey that the other mother's hand must try to snatch. Essentially, she uses the well to create a foil to the other mother's corridor; if that corridor is the other mother's mouth with which she would consume Coraline, the well is Coraline's own all-consuming mouth that successfully swallows the other mother. By covering over the well with the tablecloth, Coraline hides her oral sadistic intent.

The critics so far have commented that this scene represents repression rather than resolution. We agree that Coraline has to process the threat that the other mother represents as well as her own correlative sadistic desire. We don't, though, agree with Parsons, et al.'s sexualized reading of this scene, where the hand and the key are phallic and thus the well represents Coraline's vagina. Instead, we argue that the metaphor of the mouth is more instructive than genital metaphors, as are the corollary metaphors of swallowing and ingesting—which connect the stomach with the mind—and thus they offer a better way of understanding how Coraline is dealing with perceived evil and processing her anxieties. Coraline is not moving forward into adolescent sexuality; the novel deals with her apprehension over living in a new house and attending a new school. Her response is to regress temporarily into the oral stage, not leap toward adulthood. Given how emotionally static and empty her new life is, food takes up an inordinate amount of psychic space in her mind: it is the day residue out of which she fantasizes the conflict, to reenact the ancient drama of the oral stage. Ultimately, the huge conflict resolves a very simple fear: the novel culminates with relaxing her anxiety over attending a new school:

> Her new school clothes were laid out carefully on her chair for her to put on when she woke. Normally, on the night before the first day of term, Coraline was apprehensive and nervous. But, she realized, there was nothing left about school that could scare her anymore. (161)

Conclusion

We began our discussion with Lacan, whose theoretical approach was employed by *Coraline*'s earlier critics. Coats and Rudd in particular see the conflict of the novel as focused on individuation and independence and its resolution as Coraline's Symbolic mastery of her environment. Indeed, we do agree that Coraline comes to such a resolution, but the emphasis on food and orality within the novel strongly elicits an interpretive approach that takes into account the rich and very British historical and cultural underpinnings that Gaiman deploys as he develops his story. By marching forward into the genital stage, it is too easy to strip the novel of its historical and cultural particularities; by focusing on the food, one gets a more precise view of Coraline's psychological development. She is still a child, with a child's anxieties, not an adolescent's desires. Gaiman recognizes that, as a child, Coraline has a rich imaginative life and cultural awareness of the world in which she operates. Focused on the here and now, she produces an ingenious resolution for a common childhood anxiety.

Notes

[1]Gaiman's work in general seems to invite Lacanian readings. See S. Alexander Reed's "Through Every Mirror in the World," as well as the critics cited above.

[2]Such negotiation between father and child is not simply theoretical but can be seen chronicled in a genuine relationship in Matthew Amster-Burton's *Hungry Monkey*. Daughter Iris Amster-Burton offers an example of how a real child negotiates food within her father's Symbolic Order; she initially cleaves at a very young age to her father's food loves, then learns (by age four) how to step away from them to develop her independent sense of taste.

[3]For a complete definition of "nouvelle cuisine," see the entry in Davidson's *The Oxford Companion to Food* (544).

[4]For more information on chips, see Spencer, *British Food*; and Mason, *Food Culture in Great Britain*.

[5]Fish and chips served the needs of a growing urban working-class population, in which women frequently were laborers with little time to cook for their families. They provided a market for the North Sea cod fishing industry; technological improvements eventually made possible the transportation of fish to industrial centers far removed from the coast. Refrigeration, then freezing, made fish into a cheap and readily available food source for the lower classes, although gradually the combination appealed to middle-class families as well. See John K. Walton's *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class*.

[6]A good example is Janet Theophano's *Eat My Words*, one of the most important texts on women's writing and recipes. It shows how recipes and cookbooks are historical artifacts that unify and extend families and communities over generations.

[7]Curiously, the graphic novel version of *Coraline*, adapted by P. Craig Russell, also emphasizes the other mother's chicken, but the representation constructs a wholly different interpretation. While Russell picks up the language of the original novel, claiming that it was "the best chicken [Coraline] had ever eaten" (32), visually he makes it look

particularly disgusting as the drumstick dangles from the other mother's claw-like hand. Nor does Russell show any expression of delight on Coraline's face as she consumes it. Thus the chicken in the graphic novel does not function as the fundamental temptation to get Coraline to give up her real parents for the other mother.

[8]The rats' two songs clearly indicate that what is at stake in the narrative is Coraline's fall: "*We were here before you rose/We will be here when you fall*," they promise when she first hears them in her dreams (12); shortly after she eats the other mother's chicken dinner, they sing again: "*We were here before you fell*" (31), implying that her fall has now taken place. While she has succumbed to the other mother's temptation once, and thus apparently fallen in some sense, she can choose to resist further temptation and save her parents and herself from the other mother's clutches.

[9]Laura Mason notes that the British are so particular about apples that they divide them into two types: cooking and eating. While the consumption of raw apples is popular, the number of dishes from cooked apples is enormous: "There are numerous cooked apple desserts. Favorites include apple pie, baked apples, apple dumplings wrapped in pastry, and basic stewed apples (applesauce). Crumble . . . is also made. Grated apple is sometime added to other sweet dishes, such as Christmas mincemeat. Apple preserves include jellies, especially one made with small acid crab apples . . . and apple butter, apple purée cooked with sugar until it will set in a stiff mixture. Apples are also used in a sweet-sour spiced chutney, made for eating with cheese or cold meat" (94). The fruit even has its own holiday, Apple Day, in late October (94).

[10]Mason's discussion of hot drinks as staples of British culture, particularly her mention of tea, evokes also the tea that Misses Spink and Forcible serve to Coraline in chapter two. Here, very early in the story, Gaiman aligns Coraline with a national icon in having her consume tea from "a little pink bone china cup" and saucer (19) with her Garibaldi biscuit, thus participating in a ritualized English meal that goes back to the eighteenth century. It is notable that the tea leaves, as read by Misses Spink and Forcible, give Coraline and the reader the first inkling of her upcoming peril.

[11]Because of the length of this essay, we are not dealing with food in the Henry Selick film version of *Coraline*, though we will note here that food is such an inherent part of the plot and theme of the story that it remains a central trope in the film, which has an overtly American setting. The most telling shift in the foodways is the roast chicken dinner, which substitutes mashed potatoes for fried and adds corn on the cob, thus Americanizing the Britishness of the original text. Misses Spink and Forcible remain British, providing pulled taffy from Brighton and tea, in the leaves of which they see the warning that Coraline is in danger. There is a fascinating study to be done comparing the Britishness of the book with the Americanization of the filmed version of the story.

[12]Coraline's need to consume the other mother is not optional; she is thus contrasted with the cat and its conscious choice to sometimes release its quarry:

> The cat dropped the rat between its two front paws. "There are those," it said with a sigh, in tones as smooth as oiled silk, "who have suggested that the tendency of a cat to play with its prey is a merciful one—after all, it permits the occasional funny little running snack to escape, from time to time. How often does your dinner get to escape?" (76)

The cat clearly functions as a foil. Psychological necessity does not motivate him, because it is not his psychonarrative that the story is playing out. He can choose to eat his prey or not: he has conscious control of his actions, whereas Coraline does not. Gaiman makes clear that she *must* consume the other mother.

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